



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

Rorie Lin Gotham

“Forest stand improvement is some of the most important conservation work we do with landowners in the Sierra Nevada.”

— **Jason Jackson**,
NRCS District Conservationist



ABOVE: Firefighters hold the line on one of the fires. Mike Davis/CalFire photo

BELOW: Flames leap from a tree in the Scotchman Fire. John Hart/The Union photo



Rorie Lin Gotham owns property overlooking scenic Scotchman Creek near the Nevada County community of Washington, Calif.

On June 21, 2008, several fires sparked by lightning storms began burning nearby.

The Yuba River Complex, as the fires became known, burned over 3,000 acres. Almost 700 firefighters from Montana, Tennessee, Colorado, Florida, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska, as well as California, were brought in to fight them.

The Scotchman Fire started close to Gotham's property and burned more than a thousand acres. It came within a mile of Washington before being contained by hand and engine crews who made a fire line on the Scotchman Creek drainage, then lit backfires to consume forest fuels between the fire lines and the main part of the blaze.

“It's very steep terrain, and we're having a difficult time finding safe areas for firefighters to work,” said an incident commander. Crews also had a difficult time seeing what the fire was doing because there were few crown fires and lots of smoke.

No one was seriously injured in any of the fires and no homes were lost. A tearful Gotham gratefully acknowledges the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract she received to do forest stand improvement work as the reason her property was saved.

Her conservation plan called for thinning and pruning trees and removing the brush underneath. She says her project stimulated her neighbors to do similar work and because of that they all survived. “Fire crews were able to protect her home because the fuel load was reduced, making it safe for them to access the property,” NRCS Resource Conservationist **Paul Lake** says.

Nevada County District Conservationist **Jason Jackson** adds, “Forest stand improvement is some of the most important conservation work we do with landowners in the Sierra Nevada.”

Now, residents are asking what they can do to help prevent such an event in the future. Incident Commander **Carlton Joseph** says, “Complete your own defensible space. Help your neighbor complete their defensible space.”



A fire started by a lightning storm rages outside the town of Washington, Calif.

John Hart/The Union photo